U.S. Border Wall: A Poggean Analysis of Illegal Immigration

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ABSTRACT: Drawing on the work of John Rawls and Thomas Pogge, I argue that the U.S. is in part responsible for the immigration of Mexicans and Central Americans into the U.S. By seeking to further its national interests through its foreign policies, the U.S. has created economic and politically oppressive conditions that Mexican and Central American people seek to escape. The significance of this project is to highlight the role of the U.S. in illegal immigration so that we may first acknowledge our responsibility in order to seek lasting humane solutions.¹

Is the Militarization and Building of A Wall across the U.S. border to keep Mexican and Central American immigrants out of the U.S. the most ethical or even the most practical approach to immigration reform? U.S. foreign policies are in part responsible for the immigration problem some Americans would like to solve by militarizing the U.S. border. Rather than building a wall to keep immigrants out, Americans ought to consider the different ways in which our policies have contributed to the immigration of Mexicans and Central Americans into the U.S. I work with the ideas developed in John Rawls' The Law of Peoples (1999) and Thomas Pogge's World Poverty and Human Rights (2002) to argue that (a) Americans have a negative duty not to harm foreigners in the name of furthering

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national interests, and (b) that the militarization of the U.S. border is unjust. The fact that Central Americans immigrate to the U.S. is not due to one isolated cause and it is not merely the responsibility of the Mexican and Central American (El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras) governments and people (Warren 1994; Portes 2001; Hoefner 2007). Rather, immigration is due to a series of factors some of which are direct consequences of U.S. foreign policies with Mexico and Central America. It is ethically and practically imperative for the U.S. to recognize its role in the problem in order to target the root causes and find lasting solutions rather than building a wall that would only unethically and impractically turn a blind eye on the problem.

In 2008, there were 792,000 illegal entry attempts into the U.S. (DHS 2008). This is in part due to the 66,000 person limit on the U.S. H2-B work visa (DHS 2010). The U.S. has unilaterally considered a number of solutions to address this Among these are H.R. 4437 introduced by Jim Sensenbrenner (R. Wisconsin) in 2005. H.R. 4437 proposed building a wall across the U.S.-Mexico border, militarization of the border, and workplace raids. It proposed to make the illegal status of a person a felony while also having anyone (including family members) who helped or housed an illegal person a felon also. The length of the wall is to span from the Pacific Ocean to the Gulf of Mexico, it is to be 850 miles long, 18 feet tall, with surveillance cameras in remote areas (King 2006). Historically, U.S. border policy with Mexico has been contingent on the U.S. economy. With economic downturns, the U.S. has targeted anyone with brown skin regardless of citizenship. From 1929 to 1939, approximately 1 million people were sent to Mexico during the repatriation movement (Acuña 2004). Again, in June of 1954 1 to 3 million brown skinned people were sent to Mexico during operation wetback (Massey 2002; Acuña 2004). However, when the U.S. economy has needed cheap labor, the U.S. has fully opened its borders to allow everyone to come in and work, as it did from January 23 to February 5 of 1954 (Acuña 2004). In 2009, U.S. policies with Mexico remain historically consistent as we experience a recession and build a border wall.

This paper is divided into three sections. I first set up the problem by developing the theoretical background. I explain Rawls' conclusion to forgo the difference principle on the international level and Pogge's response to Rawls. The second section is a historical account of U.S. foreign policies with Mexico that have contributed to the immigration of Mexicans into the U.S. The third section speculates what the U.S. can do to best resolve illegal immigration.

There are several arguments in favor of controlling the U.S. border. I address the following three: First, many people believe that U.S. citizens do not have the same positive duties towards foreigners as they do to their compatriots. Since we live in the same nation state, pay taxes and agree to be governed by the U.S. laws, we then have special obligations towards our compatriots that we do not have towards human beings in general who do not share the same benefits and burdens of living under the same laws and institutions (Pogge 2002). People who believe that it is solely the Mexican and Central American peoples' responsibility for living in such negative economic conditions make a second argument in favor of controlling the U.S.-Mexico border. This second argument assumes Mexican and Central

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American people do not know how to govern themselves effectively, nor how to make the most of their resources, thus they have to immigrate to the U.S. (Pogge 1999). The third argument in favor of controlling the U.S. border is that a state has a fundamental right to control its territory as well as the duty to promote the economic well-being of its citizens and uncontrolled immigration undermines this right (DHS 2009). These three arguments favor the control of the U.S. border, however, further arguments are needed to make the case that militarization of the border and a border wall are the only or the best approach to achieve this control.

I. Theoretical background

This section considers Rawls' reasons for his rejection of the difference principle on the global level and Pogge's response to Rawls. The aim of this section is to provide the theoretical background for Pogge's argument as well as to engage the normative side of this project.

In his book A Theory of Justice, Rawls formulates a theory of justice based on the principle of fairness (1971). I am concerned here with Rawls' difference principle, which states that within the nation state, socio-economic inequalities are allowed as long as this is to the greatest benefit of the least advantaged. In The Law of Peoples, Rawls works with his theory of justice as fairness but this time on an international level, taking into consideration groups of peoples rather than individual constituents. At the domestic level, Rawls' theory of justice as fairness is very compelling, but Rawls rejects the difference principle on the global level. He believes that the liberty and equality principles that he advocates within the nation state should be implemented on the global level. However, it is not feasible for the difference principle to be maintained globally. He gives us several reasons for this: one of them is that unlike at the domestic level where every constituent is bound by the same government, we do not have a world government that could institute the required laws for the difference principle to become effective. Furthermore, within the nation state we have agreed that liberalism and democracy are values to uphold. but on the global level, a liberal democracy is a western value, not held by all cultures worldwide. Rather than impose his western liberal bias on other worldviews, Rawls believes that we should respect the different ways people govern themselves. Given that we do not have the globally agreed upon values that would be necessary for a global system to undertake the work of a world government, Rawls forgoes the difference principle on the global level.

Aside from these reasons, Rawls also believes that ultimately, wealth and poverty are due to local factors.

I believe that the causes of the wealth of a people and the forms it takes lie in their political culture and in the religious, philosophical, and moral traditions that support the basic structure of their political and social institutions, as well as in the industriousness and cooperative talents of its members, all supported by their political virtues (1999, 108).

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Rawls believes that the success or failure of a group of peoples at governing themselves is due to their own merit. He also believes that developed countries have a duty of assistance towards burdened societies. He does not believe that assisting the burdened societies by monetary means alone will do much to solve their problems. Instead, he suggests that we focus on fostering human rights to create a sense of responsibility within governments for the well being of their constituents. Although Rawls tells us that developed nations have a duty of assistance towards burdened societies, he rejects distribution models to regulate economic and social inequalities. The reason Rawls rejects distribution models is because global income distribution theories do not generally have a cut off point. His goal is not to do away with all inequalities. His main concern is to assist burdened societies, but beyond assistance, Rawls does not believe developed nations have any other duties towards burdened societies.

Unlike Rawls, who believes that the wealth or poverty of a state is ultimately due to local factors, Pogge believes that global factors influence the local economies.

A society's economic position arises from the interplay of national and global factors. With economically weak societies especially, global factors are dominant, even shaping such national factors as what kinds of persons gain political power, what incentives these leaders face, what options they have, and how implementation of any of their options would affect national economic performance. Rawls' utopia is flawed, then, by excluding the concern to maintain global background justice, and by excluding any preference for structuring the global economy so that it moderates inequalities and enables especially the economically weakest societies to grow.... Rawls' account misleads us into perceiving our present moral failure as a case of insufficient assistance to the poor, when it really consists in the imposition upon them of a skewed global order that obstructs and hampers their development (2001, 253).

Pogge disagrees with Rawls on the duties owed by developed nations towards burdened societies. Whereas Rawls believes developed nations only have a duty of assistance, Pogge believes the moral issue is not one of assistance. Instead we have the negative duty not to harm burdened societies. A number of changes ought to be implemented in the global economy given that the existing global economy is largely the responsibility of developed nations and creates unjust burdens on developing countries. It is important to stress the difference between a positive duty of assistance and a negative duty not to cause harm because critics of Pogge's argument have often misunderstood it (Pogge 2005). Rawls rejects the distribution model of the difference principle and although it is true that this does not rule out the possibility of other distribution models, these models are based on the positive duty of assistance. The difference between Rawls and Pogge is that Pogge does not argue for a positive duty of assistance, but for the negative duty not to cause harm. A positive duty of assistance assumes we ought to help those in need by giving to charity organizations (Singer 1972).

Pogge's argument towards a negative duty not to cause harm addresses the first argument in favor of controlling the U.S. border, namely that U.S. citizens do not have the same positive duties towards foreigners than to our compatriots. Though admittedly we do not owe foreigners the same positive duties we owe our compatriots, we do owe foreigners the negative duty not to interfere with their development.

Pogge points out that developed nations are partially responsible for world poverty because insofar as developed nations seek to further their national interests, they skew the global market in their favor. His argument makes two important distinctions, one is the problem of nationalism and the second is that by acting in the name of national interests, developed nations economically and politically hinder the development of already struggling countries.

To illustrate, Pogge explains how there are times when we form part of communities that foster loyalty and a sense of community among one group at the expense of decreasing what is owed to the people outside of said community. He provides the examples of the relationships between a property owner and his lawyer vis-à-vis the building tenants, and that of a company's C.E.O. and the shareholders vis-à-vis the general public. Pogge points out the moral loopholes these relationships create and explains how furthering the interests of one group at the expense of another is clearly unethical. Though he does not object to us forming communities that demand more of ourselves or that foster more loyalty among the members—as long as these communities do not lower the level of dignity with which people outside of the community are treated.

When deciding on foreign policies, Pogge warns us against merely seeking to further our national interests. Nationalism creates a division that is only concerned with people inside the national community while completely ignoring how our foreign policies affect those that are outside of the nation state. By seeking to further national interests, developed nations have created and supported a global economic system that favors and maintains the hegemony of the affluent western countries. In terms of the U.S., if our foreign policies are primarily guided by the goal of furthering national interests, we ignore that undermining the flourishing of those who are not inside our nation state affects everyone, including us, adversely. U.S. citizens are not immune to the violence generated by U.S. foreign policy. In December of 1980, three American nuns and a laywoman went to El Salvador to help struggling peasants. They were beaten, raped and murdered by soldiers of the Salvadoran National Guard, which was financially supported by the U.S. (BBC 1998).

Political and economic oppression forces people to emigrate, seeking escape from corrupt and violent environments that result from such policies.

It is convenient for us citizens of wealthy countries, and therefore common, to ignore such interdependencies—to explain the severe underfulfillment of human rights in so many countries by reference to local factors domestic to the country in which it occurs. This explanatory nationalism... diverts attention from the question of how we ourselves might be involved, causally and morally, in this sad phenomenon (Pogge 2002, 49).

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By identifying the role and responsibility that the U.S. and other developed countries have in the oppression of people worldwide, Pogge addresses the second argument in favor of further controlling the U.S border. Most often, we blame the Mexican and Central American governments for their ineptitude while conveniently not noticing how U.S. foreign policies contribute to the immigration of people into the U.S.

Pogge believes that a fervent sense of nationalism is the source of much harm to humankind. The problem with nationalism is that it blatantly reduces the moral dignity we owe to anyone who is not a member of our nation and blatantly increases the moral worth of our compatriots. Nationalism not only gives preferred treatment to certain people over others, but it is also considered to be a virtue.

In some ways, there should not be anything wrong with feeling proud of one's culture, nor is there anything wrong with owing a higher amount of loyalty to certain people over others, as long as being a member of one community does not require that we treat people outside our community with less dignity. Pogge agrees for example, that there is nothing wrong with feeling a higher degree of loyalty to one's family or spouse—though being married does not imply that a man or woman may treat other people who are not their spouse with less dignity than the minimal human dignity. Being members of a community—any community—should not be based on lowering our moral treatment of people who fall outside our group.

While furthering national interests, the U.S. and other developed nations legitimize corrupt governments by trading with them, buying their resources or providing them with loans. Pogge argues that there is a direct causal relationship between the U.S. furthering its national interests and the economic oppression of developing countries. He writes, "Even their own, rather impotent governments face strong incentives to cater to foreign interests rather than to those of their constituents" (1992, 66). As our global economy stands, it creates incentives for coups d'état, political instability, violence and economic oppression.

Furthermore, Pogge reminds us that many of the developed nations did not quite come to their position of power through fair trade among autonomous states. He asks that we acknowledge the historical development of poverty.

The present circumstances of the global poor are significantly shaped by a dramatic period of conquest and colonization, with severe oppression, enslavement, even genocide, through which the native institutions and cultures of four continents were destroyed or severely traumatized. This is not to say (or to deny) that affluent descendants of those who took part in these crimes bear some special restitutive responsibility toward impoverished descendants of those who were victims of these crimes. The thought is rather that we must not uphold extreme inequality in social starting positions when the allocation of these positions depends upon historical processes in which moral principles and legal rules were massively violated. A morally deeply tarnished history should not be allowed to result in *radical* inequality (2002, 203).

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Unlike Rawls, for Pogge the issue is not one of assistance. Insofar as developed nations continue to skew the global market in their favor they continue to create conditions that prevent the global poor from flourishing. The practical implication of Pogge's argument is that the immigration of Mexicans and Central Americans into the U.S. has taken place in part because the U.S. has created and sustained foreign policies that further its interests while undermining developing countries.

There are some potential problems with Pogge's arguments and the specific conclusions regarding immigration into the U.S. The most common objection comes from failure to understand Pogge's argument. Individuals who disagree with Pogge's conclusions cannot oppose his arguments on the ground that we do not have an obligation of assistance towards people in need. Pogge does not argue for the positive duty of assistance, but for the negative duty not to cause harm.

A second objection makes the point that if it is the global economy that creates incentives for corrupt governments, then this weakens the claim that the U.S. foreign policies are the cause of immigration and so changes in our policies will not fix the problem. In response to this objection, assuming that the cause of poverty is due to individual countries or the global economic structure in a mutually exclusive manner is to commit a false dichotomy fallacy. Ethically, we ought to consider how U.S. foreign policies affect Central Americans so as not to preclude their development.

A third objection is that although one might admit that U.S. policies do further entrench corrupt governments, to fail to engage these corrupt governments might be worse altogether. In response to this objection, Pogge does not argue for developed countries to stop engaging corrupt governments. The point of his argument is for developed countries to acknowledge the power they have to shape the global economy. The goal is for developed countries not to harm citizens of developing countries, who simply do not have the same negotiating leverage.

A fourth objection is that Pogge slides between claims that (a) certain policies negatively affect the well being of people in developing countries, and (b) that policies are an affront to their dignity. It is one thing to say that U.S. foreign policies negatively affect the well being of some people. It is another thing to say that these policies constitute an infringement on their human rights, and yet another to say that these policies are an affront their dignity. Regarding claim (a), at times this may be unavoidable and morally unproblematic. Regarding claim (b), if our foreign policies are an infringement on their human rights, we would be required to know what these human rights are and how this infringement qualifies as an affront to their dignity.

In response to this objection, due to a number of U.S. foreign policies (treated with more detail in the next section) with Central American governments, many farmers have not been able to compete with U.S. subsidized agribusiness. These farmers have had to either emigrate to the U.S. to seek work, or grow illicit crops in order to make ends meet (Andreas 1996). Over the last fifteen years, there has been a surge of illegal substance traffic from Mexico to the U.S. Drug cartels have either bought out local officials, or murdered those who are uncooperative. Policies meant to advance U.S. national interests, have helped to create a situation in which developing countries generate income through the smuggling of illegal drugs and

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people into the U.S. (Andreas 1996). Minimally, this situation affects Central Americans' well-being. In the worst case scenario, innocent people are being murdered. To put the violence Central Americans are fleeing in context, over 1,300 people were murdered in 2008 in Ciudad Juarez alone (Negron 2009). This figure includes children, women, and innocent by-standers. It is also a higher number of deaths than the 904 service men and women who were killed in 2007, the bloodiest year of the Iraq war (Iraq Coalition 2009).

Another objection might be made on the grounds that this is a zero-sum game and a rising tide actually raises everyone's well-being. Regarding this idea, this is logically possible; however, the weight of this possibility should be substantiated with empirical data. In the meantime, current U.S. policies are not working ethically or practically. The death rate of people who attempt to cross the U.S.-Mexico border is that of four people every three days, this is roughly 500 people dying per year since 1995 (U.S. Accountability Office 2006). The number of people who have died attempting to cross the U.S.-Mexico border is almost ten times the number of people who died attempting to escape East Germany by jumping over the Berlin Wall (Deutsche Welle 2005). At the very least, the U.S. ought to consider the causal role that its policies have played and continue to play in the deaths of so many people.

II. U.S. foreign policies with Mexico that have contributed to immigration

This section further addresses the second argument in favor of controlling the U.S. border, namely that the Mexican government is solely responsible for Mexicans immigrating to the U.S. It also substantiates Pogge's argument that developed countries further their interests while undermining the development of already burdened countries.

The history of Mexican immigration into the U.S. is long and complicated. The states of Texas, New Mexico, Arizona, California, Nevada, Colorado, Utah and parts of Wyoming were over half of the Mexican territory before 1848 (Acuña 2004). These states were sold to the U.S. by Mexico in the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo as settlement for the Mexican American war 1846-1848. This is to say that Mexicans have lived in the southwest longer than Anglo-Americans. The treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo promised the Mexican land owners citizenship in the U.S. but the U.S. did not make good on this promise (Acuña 2004). U.S. citizens of Mexican descent were shipped back to Mexico along with immigrants during the repatriation movement 1929-1939, and operation wetback 1954.

The first major wave of immigration from Mexico to the U.S. took place during the Mexican revolution (1910-1917). Roughly one million people came to the U.S. from Mexico as political refugees (Library of Congress 2009). The second wave of immigration lasted longer and was more substantial than the first. In 1942, during the Second World War, the U.S. suffered a labor shortage and instituted the Bracero Program—a guest-worker program that utilized cheap Mexican labor. By 1964, when the Bracero Program came to an end, the U.S. had employed over five million Mexican farm laborers (Acuña 2004). U.S. companies went to Mexico to recruit men and presented the Bracero Program as a great opportunity for Mexicans to

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obtain work in the U.S. (Bacon 2008). Historically, the Bracero Program has come to be defined by the exploitation of Mexican labor, violation of civil rights, substandard wages, inadequate housing for the workers, and discriminatory practices (Portes 2001). At the end of the Bracero Program many Mexican men remained in the U.S., others continued to come back and forth between the two countries as seasonal farm workers, but most importantly, the pattern of immigration from Mexico to the U.S. was firmly established over the twenty-two years of the Bracero Program (Massey 2002; Acuña 2004; Akers 2006).

In 1994 Canada, the U.S. and Mexico signed the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) that eliminated most of the tax on products traded among these three states. NAFTA has been greatly beneficial to business owners and elites in all three countries, but has had a crushing impact on independent Mexican farmers (Bacon 2008). There are about "3.5 million corn farmers, 85 percent of whom grow on 5 hectares or less (average U.S. corn spreads are 270 acres), [and] have no access to the NAFTA market whatsoever" (Ross 2008, 32). The average Mexican farmer cannot compete with U.S. subsidized agribusiness. As a result, many farmers have lost their farms. They have migrated to industrial cities in the U.S.-Mexico border to work in maquiladoras, or have immigrated to the U.S. altogether. Maguiladoras are American owned factories that have set up shop in Mexico. These corporations benefit from inexpensive Mexican labor, which is \$2.63 dollars/hr., as compared to the cost of labor in the U.S. \$23.65 dollars/hr (U.S. Department of Labor 2007). American companies save money by paying less on wages, employment benefits, and the process of manufacturing due to Mexico's relaxed environmental regulations.

Given that the pattern of immigration was established through the Bracero Program and that Mexican farmers cannot compete with American agribusiness, many people have opted to immigrate to the U.S. At \$2.63/hr. maquiladora workers do not earn enough money to support their families. In 2007, the Mexican monthly median wage was \$409.20 and the minimum daily wage was \$20.90 (Salas 2008; Mexperience 2009). The oppressive economic conditions in Mexico compel Mexicans to immigrate to the U.S. in search of better paying jobs. They are lured by the prospect of a better life and future for their children and they seek to leave the violent environment created by drug cartels.

Once in the U.S., Mexicans are able to find jobs since there are many employers who are willing to hire them illegally and pay them less than the minimum wage (Bacon 2008). The U.S. economy benefits enormously from Mexican and Central American labor both in their original countries (by employing them in maquiladoras) and in here in the U.S. (cheap immigrant labor). These immigrants take jobs that Americans do not generally want in the agricultural industry, construction, janitors, and meat packing industry (Martinez 2001). Since undocumented workers are working illegally, their labor is easily exploited. Oftentimes they are not paid for their work, they cannot claim any benefits, taxes or workers rights (Massey 2002). They are paid wages below the minimum wage, and are in effect a class of people lower than the lower class. They cannot complain about the exploitation of their labor or other abuses at work. Who would they

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complain to? Undocumented workers prefer to endure this exploitation rather than to be deported (Bacon 2008).

III. What can the U.S. do about the problem?

This section addresses the third argument in favor of controlling the U.S. border, namely that the U.S. has a fundamental right to control its borders and uncontrolled immigration undermines this right. I agree with this argument. The U.S. need not abolish its borders and welcome everyone in. It is in the U.S. best interest, however, to acknowledge that its foreign policies (Mexican American war, Bracero Program, and NAFTA to name a few) have in part created and exacerbated the patterns of Mexican immigration into the U.S. The U.S. does have the duty to promote the economic well being of its citizens, but it should not do this, as Pogge argues, by undermining the development of human beings in other countries.

When considering how to approach the immigration issue, policy makers must first acknowledge the contradiction generated by U.S. policies that seek to make the border impermeable to immigrants while also promoting a borderless economy based on free market principles. Policy makers also ought to consider how certain policies (e.g., the border wall) would splinter existing communities along the U.S. Mexico border placing unfair burdens on these communities.

The U.S. should also make the best attempt to legalize the status of undocumented workers. They are human beings who deserve to be treated with dignity, their hard work respected and their contribution to the U.S. economy acknowledged. With this in mind, it is essential that undocumented workers themselves be at the negotiating table to ensure that their interests are represented alongside those of other involved groups. It is in the process of working together to solve a mutual problem that we learn how to see each other's perspectives, come to respect each other, and develop a mutual language that addresses the needs of the community of inquiry. This is nothing more than a democratic approach to developing a working and lasting solution.

IV. Conclusion

My goal has been to ground the immigration of Central Americans into the U.S. in the theoretical background of Rawls' and Pogge's work on international justice. Also, to provide evidence that U.S. foreign policies are partially responsible for this immigration. Historically, unjust laws have become codified into the U.S. legal system. Once this takes place, it becomes illegal and hence punishable to break these unjust laws. Likewise, the nature of a person's employment is codified in the U.S. legal system in such a way that it is legal for some and illegal for others to seek employment in order to support their families. It is morally imperative that we recognize the difference between illegal and unjust when thousands of people are dying for the opportunity to work.

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